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ABSTRACT

Two hundred fifty-five students in grades 2 through 6 and 51 teachers participated in structured interviews to assess how democratic governance was practiced in their classrooms. Teachers also completed the Pupil Control Ideology Form (PCI), which measures orientation toward control of pupils. Findings showed that students do not want to rule their classrooms. Democratic governance is not given a high priority in the classroom, and is limited to procedures such as voting and arriving at consensus in controversial situations. Those teachers who do let students make decisions encourage them more often to work cooperatively and report observing students using democratic governance in informal situations. More experienced teachers tended to rely more on patriotic exercises but these exercises had little or no effect on promoting democratic governance. The PCI was not useful for evaluating democratic governance practices. Recommendations include additional training for teachers in group decision making and in facilitating cooperative grouping. Teachers should learn to differentiate patriotic exercises from substantive instruction in democratic governance. Structured interviews worked well but might be supplemented by classroom observation and examination of lesson plans. (IS)

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DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND CONTROL IDEOLOGY

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SP 016 133

NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAIN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
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Political alienation and self-righteous authoritarianism both threaten the democratic principles upon which this country was founded. Public schools have a major responsibility to countervail these forces by preparing citizens who are knowledgeable about, consciously choose, and consistently practice democracy. Despite the numerous opportunities for daily participation and reflection regarding democratic governance, schools generally limit what they teach about democracy and it's accompanying responsibilities to class recitations and patriotic exercises.

In response to these limitations both the National Council for the Social Studies (Hepburn, 1983) and the Wyoming State Board of Education (1980) have mandated that students learn the process and structure of democratic governance through experiences in their schools. The state has further mandated that the responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of these experiences falls on the local school district.

The initial effort by Laramie County School District #1 to assess the democratic governance experiences offered to elementary-aged students is reported in this study. This report should not be considered a complete review of democractic governance as practiced in elementary schools within the district. Rather, the reported findings represent a foundation for a more thorough and far-reaching evaluation procedure.

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BACKGROUND

Research in political socialization conducted during the past two decades provides strong evidence that school experiences influence the political orientations of its constituents. Hess and Torney (1967) examined the political attitudes of elementary-aged school children in eight cities from four regions of the country. They concluded that school is "the most important and effective instrument of political socialization in the United States" (p.101). Hess and Tourney further conclude while the family shapes basic loyalties, "the school apparently plays the largest part in teaching attitudes, conceptions, and beliefs about the operation of the political system" (p.217). These conclusions are substantiated by other researchers who have investigated political socialization (Greenstein,1967; Mullis, 1978; Torney, 1970)

Examination of how schools and teachers affect political socialization have been conducted by several researchers. Greenstein (1967) concluded that political allienations are learned in the early years by American children without direct instruction. Torney (1970) suggested that schools serve to develop a set of expectations regarding systems of authority which is then transferred to other institutions. Feelings of powerlessness and alientation were found to be positively correlated with "custodial" school control, characterized by rigidity and correlated with high regulation, in comparison to more cooperative "humanistic" control which emphasizes self-discipline (Rafeledes and Hoy, 1971). This does not imply that

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students seek unlimited participation in establishing school goals. Serow and Strike (1978) concluded that students do not want unlimited say in how schools should be run. In fact, students look to school administration to be the ultimate arbiter of peer conflicts and support efoorts by administrators to protect students from physical and psychological injury.

The distinction between learning about democratic governance and nationalistic ritual was the subject of an international study by Torney, Oppenheim, and Faren (1975). They found that in countries where schools stressed nationalastic and patriotic rituals or tradional recitation, students were less knowledgeable about, and showed less support for, democratic values and processes.

Research into the political socialization and attitudes about involvement in school governance is germaine to this study for the following reasons. Because of the greater number of opportunities the school environment provides, it has a significant impact on youngsters developing attitudes towards political processes, probably more impact than even the home (Ehman, 1980; Greenstein, 1967; Hess & Tourney, 1967; Mullis, 1978; Tourney, 1970). Furthermore, these developing attitudes are shaped by the amount of participation and influence students have in establishing school rules and goals (Rafeledes & Hoy, 1971). When it comes to participation and influence in establishing school rules more is not necessarily better from a students point of view. Students do not desire unlimited power in running

schools (Serow & Strike, 1978).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In compliance with the Wyoming State Board of Education mandate, the administration of Laramie County School District #1 needed to collect data to establish the amount and nature of learning about democratic governance offered to elementary students enrolled in the district. Both students and their teachers participated in structured interviews to assess how democratic governance was practiced in their classrooms. In addition, a standardized self-report instrument was administered to the teachers to measure their disposition towards democratic governance in their classrooms.

This study was conducted as a preliminary evaluation of democratic governance in selected elementary schools. The information gathered in this study will be used to design a more systematic and comprehensive procedure to evaluate democratic governance in elementary schools throughout the district.

METHODS

SUBJECTS

The sample used in this study was drawn from five of 22 elementary schools

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in the district. Schools to which student teachers were assigned were selected to participate in this study since the student teachers assisted in collecting data.

Participating in this study were 255 elementary students (129 males and 126 females) and 51 teachers. Only students from grades two through six were included because first graders were deemed too young to comprehend the questions used in the structured interview. Table 1 gives a breakdown by grade level of the number of teachers and students who participated in the research. Teachers reported having from 2-30 years of teaching experience (median = 11); 96 % have had post-baccalaureate coursework (median = 27 credit hours).

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TABLE 1

BREAKDOWN BY GRADE LEVEL

THE NUMBER OF CLASSES IN THE STUDY

GRADE LEVEL	NO. OF CLASSES
SECOND	9
THIRD	13
FOURTH	13
FIFTH	8
SIXTH	8

The questions used in the teacher form of the structured interview were constructed to elicit information about the amount and nature of democratic governance teachers provided for students in their classroom. Teachers were asked in what kinds of situations, eg. classroom management or curriculum design, they permitted or observed democratic governance being practiced. Teachers were also questioned about the frequency of patriotic exercises they practiced in their classroom and the relationship of those exercises to learning about democratic governance.

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One month after the structured interview, teachers were asked to complete the Pupil Control Ideology Form (PCI). The PCI is a self-report instrument that measures orientation toward pupil control on a humanistic-custodial continum. A humanistic ideology stresses an accepting, trustful view of pupils and optimism concerning their ability to be self-disciplining and responsible. A custodial ideology, on the other hand, emphasizes the maintenance of order, distrust of pupils, and a moralistic attitude toward deviance. Possible score on the PCI range from 20 to 100, with a higher score indicating a more custodial ideology. The PCI has been used in over 62 studies; split-half reliability estimates have ranged from .91 to .95 with samples of public-school educators.

The questions on the student form of the structured interview were constructed to gain information about the amount and nature of democratic governance students experienced. Questions were also constructed to ascertain the number of times a patriotic ritual, i.e. the Pledge of Allegiance, was used in the classroom. Additionally, students were asked about the kinds of rules they should be allowed to make and if they established rules in their play activities outside of school. Finally, students were asked what kinds of opportunities they had to plan and work in cooperation with classmates.

PROCEDURE

Pre-service teachers enrolled in a student teaching program assisted in the

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data collection. The student teachers were given a two-hour training by the researchers as to the procedure for completing the structured interview. Because this was only a preliminary study, the student teachers were free to interview any second through sixth grade teachers from the building to which they were assigned. For each teacher interviewed, the student teacher randomly selected five students from that teacher's classroom to interview. Once the structured interviews were completed, the teacher was requested to complete the PCI and return the instrument to the student teacher.

RESULTS

FINDINGS

The analysis of data collected in this study will be reported in the following manner. Means, standard deviations, and median scores will be reported for selected variables relative to the importance of democratic governance will be reported first. Frequenceies of teacher responses to democratic governance practices will be reported next. Finally, frequencies of student reponses to democratic governance will be given.

The mean, standard deviation, median, and range of selected variables rating the importance of democratic governance in elementary classrooms is reported in Table 2. Teachers rate the importance of teaching about democratic governance much higher, $x = 5.02$, when compared to using

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patriotic experiences as a means of teaching democratic governance, x = 3.61. The rating of importance of concepts related to democratic governance shows internal consistency. An alpha of internal consistency was computed to be .91. The final entry in Table 2, reports student ratings of the fequency of saying the pledge of allegiance.

TABLE 2

RATINGS OF IMPORTANCE OF DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

TOPIC	MEAN	S.D.	MEDIAN	RANGE
Importance of learning about democratic governance	5.02	1.27	5.31	0-6
Importance of concepts related to democratic governance:				
justice	4.80	1.57	5.25	0-6
obligation	4.88	1.38	5.25	0-6
cooperation	5.52	.986	5.79	0-6
participatory decision-making	4.80	1.35	5.11	0-6
equality	5.00	1.45	5.56	0-6
respect for individual and minority rights	5.43	1.18	5.77	0-6
order and security	4.60	1.40	4.77	0-6
rationality	3.78	1.76	3.96	0-6
freedom of speech	4.54	1.68	5.00	0-6
freedom of religion	4.60	1.85	5.35	0-6
due process	4.13	1.77	4.67	0-6
right to a jury by one's peers	3.86	1.74	3.94	0-6
democracy is a process & decisions can be changed	4.5	1.68	4.94	0-6
Patriotic exercises as a means of teaching democratic governance	3.61	1.48	3.55	0-6
Amount of student participation in deciding classroom rules	1.20	1.13	1.04	0-3
Student report of frequency of saying the Pledge of Allegiance	2.02	1.17	1.45	0-4

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The frequency of teacher responses to democrtatic governance practices is shown in Table 3. The majority of teachers (76%) observe their students using democratic governance informally. Only 63% of the teachers, however, allow students to participate in making classroom rules.

TABLE 3

FREQUENCIES OF TEACHER RESPONSES TO DEMOCRATIC GCVERNANCE PRACTICES

TOPIC	PERCENTAGE YES N=51
Observed students using democratic governance informally	76
Examples of Situations:	
Games	35
Taking Turns	16
Free Time	8
Could Not Give Example	41
Discuss the reasons and method of forming our type of government	75
Students participate in making class rules	63
Processes used for promoting democratic governance:	
Majority Rules	76
Elicit suggestions, teacher decides	65
Informal consensus	63
Elicit suggestions, secret ballot	55
Contracts	43
Representative democracy	27
Formal or informal use of cooperative learning activities	76

Additionally, teachers were asked if to estimate the number of hours they devoted to discussing the reasons and method of how this government was formed. The average number of hours devoted to such discussion was ten.

Similarly, teachers were asked to estimate the number of times per year the concepts of the words of the pledge of allegiance were discussed. Their responses ranged from zero to 22 times per year. The mode of responses to this question was once.

The frequency of student responses to democratic governance practices is shown in Table 4. There is a discrepancy between the frequency of teacher responses (63%) and student responses (42%) concerning opportunities for students to help decide class rules. Similarly a discrepancy exists between the frequency of teacher responses (76%) and student responses (82%) regarding cooperative learning opportunities.

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TABLE 4

FREQUENCIES OF STUDENT RESPONSES TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

TOPIC	PERCENTAGE YES N=255
Recitation of Pledge:	
Every day	52
Once a week	6
Occasionally	27
Not recited	14
Make-up rules for games	71
Get to help decide classroom rules	42
Would like to help decide classroom rules	58
Are there some rules students shouldn't be allowed decision-making about	67
Examples of things students shouldn't decide about:	
Chewing gum	27
Talking without permission	13
Throwing snowballs	12
Leaving seat or class without permission	10
Safety rules	10
Opportunities to plan class activities	70
Those who voted no - who would like opportunity	59
Opportunities to cooperate (work together with classmates)	82
Examples of types of cooperative activities:	
Math	16
Spelling	28
Science experiments	12
Free time	10
(Other: English, Social Studies, Reading, Studying)	less than 10

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The PCI was administered to the teacher about a month after the structured interview. The mean total score for the 51 teachers on the PCI was 43.1 with a standard deviation of 18. The reader is reminded that the higher the total score, which can range from 20 to 100, the more custodial the ideology of the teacher. The internal consistency coefficient of the PCI was computed to be .91 for this sample.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed between selected variables from the teachers' and students' structured interview. The following coefficients were statistically significant at $p < .01$:

$r = .52$ (Ratings of importance of democratic concepts and observations of students practicing democractic governance in informal situations.)

$r = .33$ (Teacher ratings of importance of teaching democratic governance and students reporting they help decide classroom rules.)

$r = .31$ (Number of years in teaching and belief in patriotic exercises as a means of teaching democratic governance.)

$r = .30$ (Opportunities teachers provide for group decision making and cooperative work groups.)

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r = .54 (opportunities teachers provide for group decision making and observations of students practicing democratic governance in informal situations.)

CONCLUSIONS

The findings reported in the previous section support the following conclusions:

1. Consistent with other studies, it was found that students do not wish to run their schools. Students seem to prefer looking to others to provide rules, decisions, justice, and security.

2. Democratic governance is not given a high priority in the classroom. While teachers have a uniformly high opinion of the value of selected democratic principles and the importance of learning democratic principles, actual classroom practice of democracy seems low. In other words, many teachers and students do not expect democratic governance in the classroom.

3. Democratic governance is limited to procedures such as voting and arriving at consensus in conventional situations.

4. Teachers who let students make decisions also more often encourage them to work cooperatively and report observing students using democratic

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governance in informal situations.

5. The number of years in the profession correlates positively with the use of patriotic exercises as a means of promoting democratic governance. The use of patriotic exercises, however, appears to have little or no effect in promoting democratic governance.

6. The PCI is not useful as an instrument for assessing democratic practices in elementary schools. While it may be a vaid measure of pupil control ideology, the data collected in this study does not support its use in evaluating democratic governance practices.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Teachers need additional training in using democratic processes in the classroom. The training should not focus solely on democratic governance pertaining to classroom management. Rather, teachers should be given guidance in providing for group decision making in instructional processes and curriculum, as well as in classroom management. An excellent resource for teachers can be found in Chase and John (1972).

Facilitating cooperative grouping is another area where additional training may influence classroom practices. Students seem to have the capacity, and perhaps an inherent need, to work with their peers. Since an effective democracy requires cooperation among its constituents, shcools should

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foster cooperative working relationships.

Teachers should be led to make clearer distinctions between the relationship of democratic governance and patriotic exercises. Certainly the expression of loyalty and patriotism are appropriate activities within a school. Patriotic exercises, however, should not be confused with or substituted for providing students with instruction in the structure, processes, and historical roots of our democratic form of government.

In future evaluations of democratic pracitices the use of structured interviews seems to be a useful method of collecting data. While student teachers were accpetable interviewers in this preliminary study, it is the conclusion of the researchers that one or two individuals, well trained in conducting structured interviews, would ensure collection of accurate data.

Structured interviews, however, need not be the only method employed. In addition, classroom observations by school district administrators could be used in the evaluation process. Lesson plans could be examined specifically for evidence of cooperative grouping and democratic governance. Since the PCI did not significantly correlate with any questions on the interview regarding democratic governance, its use as an evaluation instrument is of questionable value.

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